

Expeditionary Assault Ship Replacement

The amphibious fleet is organized for forward presence into 12 Amphibious Ready Groups (ARGs)—which, in turn, become part of Expeditionary Strike Groups (ESGs)—each with three ships. The centerpiece of the ARG is a *Wasp*-class or *Tarawa*-class amphibious assault ship. The five ships of the *Tarawa*-class general-purpose amphibious assault ships (LHA) reach the end of their expected service lives at the rate of one per year from 2011 to 2015. The LHD-8 will replace one of the LHAs, leaving the LHA(R) program to replace the last four *Tarawa*-class LHAs.

In March 2001, the Navy and Joint Staff approved and validated the LHA(R) Mission Need Statement. The office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics authorized Milestone “A” Acquisition status for the program, as well as its entry into the Concept Exploration phase in July 2001. Under Department of Defense guidance, the Navy conducted an analysis of alternatives (AoA) study to determine the best method of

replacing the four remaining LHAs. This study, completed in the summer of 2002, evaluated the following alternatives:

A repeat LHD-8 with evolutionary modifications;

The LHD Plug Plus (an LHD-8 modified to be 77 feet longer and 10 feet wider), upgraded to enhance its ability to operate the larger and more capable new-generation amphibious systems; and,

New ship designs spanning a wide range of size and capability.

Navy and Marine Corps leadership determined that a transformational new design would be the most suitable choice based on cost, capability, and schedule. The first ship is currently scheduled for an FY 2007 contract award and an FY 2013 delivery, with the following ships in the class being acquired every three years. This extended procurement and construction schedule will result in the last *Tarawa*-class LHA being retired in 2022, seven years past its 35-year expected service life.

